

## ADDRESS OF WILLIAM H. TAFT

at the Peace Meeting at Carnegie Hall, New York, Sunday, May 17, 1914



WITH our dreadnoughts and our other battle-ships at Tampico, Vera Cruz and Mazatlan, with 5,000 or more of our regular army in possession of a Mexican city, and with the rest of our available force assembling at convenient strategic points for possible further invasion of Mexican territory, it may occur to some that it is not appropriate to have a Peace Sunday or to hold a Peace meeting. For those of us, however, who hope that we may not be involved in further warlike activity, or in actual war, there could be no time more fitting for an expression of that hope. This is not a time for wishing that the past had been otherwise, but it is a time for candor and for a clear understanding of the situation. Our arguments and our hopes for peace will seem reasonable only when we make it clear that we are not blind to existing conditions. With deference to the views of others, it is my judgment, that if, in our course toward Mexico during the last year, we had not exerted such direct influence as we have, to aid one of the contending parties, we would not now be so near general intervention and war. Nor would we

have been so responsible for law and order in Mexico to the world, as we are now likely to be if a new Government comes into power through our influence. So much I think I should say in order that I may not be misunderstood. But not for this reason, can I or anyone who agrees with me in this, fail to approve and applaud every honorable effort that our Government can make, and is making, to avoid intervention and further conflict.

I yield to no man in my earnest desire for peace and in my detestation of war; but an advocacy of peace that ignores conditions and takes no note of what is practical is futile and ineffective. Threatened war between two stable nations is much easier to deal with than such a condition as that which confronts us in Mexico. I am glad to feel that there is a noteworthy movement toward the adoption of practical machinery for avoiding war between responsible governments. The Hague Conferences, and treaties of arbitration, the serious proposal for a permanent arbitral court, the more frequent intervention of powers to mediate and prevent collision, are an earnest of the progress that is making toward general peace. What we have in Mexico to contend with, however, is the disease of revolution. Eighty per cent. of the people are ignorant and illiterate. They have not had proper opportunities for self-help. They have suffered wrong, and are struggling blindly with purpose more or less ill-

defined, in a state of society whose bonds are almost entirely loosed. A three years' war has laid waste the country, destroyed its industry, and exposed all foreigners resident in the country to lawless violence and all their investments there to destruction. It has in fact become an international nuisance. In such a case a neighboring nation may properly intervene and help the forces of law and order to end such anarchy just because it wishes to live in a quiet neighborhood, and not from a spirit of conquest and greed of territory. Of course the discharge of a neighborly duty of imperfect obligation like this, involving expenditure of life and treasure, a nation is entirely justified in seeking every honorable means to avoid, and in assuming it only when no other course is possible. But if we are to be involved in war because of Mexican anarchy, let us have it fully understood that we go into it "in the services of mankind," as the President phrases it, and not upon the issue of a mere punctilio in naval ceremonial. Let us count the cost. Let us soberly face what is before us. Let us not enter lightly or unadvisedly upon a course that will involve a sacrifice the extent of which may well make us pause.

There are 14,000,000 people in Mexico. Much of it is in the Tropics. There are seven hundred and sixty thousand square miles. Large parts of it are trackless deserts; large parts of it are difficult mountain ranges; large parts of it are Tropical jungle and for-

est. We have say 50,000 troops of our regular army fit to take the field in Mexico. If the available military force of men trained and made hardy by a three years' war were to be massed against our troops, we should need a much larger force than we now have to capture the strategic inland towns. After we had captured them and dispersed the armies, the forces against us would adopt a system of guerrilla warfare. That is easy to carry on and difficult to suppress, in such a country. The best expert estimate of the force required by us to capture and garrison the necessary towns, suppress the guerrilla warfare and tranquillize the country, is 400,000 men, and it is said that this would take two or three years and involve an expenditure of \$1,000,000 a day. The wisest course for us to pursue, if the duty is before us, of suppressing anarchy in Mexico, would be to blockade all the Mexican ports, because the military weakness of the country is not in lack of hardy men, but in lack of military supplies and in lack of food provision. If we would be content to take the seaports and blockade the country while we were making reasonable preparation for the task, then when ready for action we could do the work at the least cost of life and time and money. But the public might become impatient with this counsel of prudence. We would probably have to act quickly, and possibly meet some painful mishaps due to our haste. The suppression of guerrilla bands would be drawn out. It

would be a captains' and a lieutenants' war, and require a tedious effort to train our soldiers to live in the country, to chase the flying guerrillas and ultimately capture them. It would be a dead pull which would wear the patience of the nation and in which the few lives lost in each little engagement would total large and would grow less and less tolerable as the dreary contest went on. Disease in that tropic country would thin our ranks more than bullets. Then after having lost thousands of lives and expended a treasure, double that which it has cost us to give to the world the Panama Canal, we would have on our hands a hostile Mexican people, without any gratitude for our sacrifices. Our duty to them and to ourselves would be to give them a government, as secure as practicable against a recurrence of anarchical conditions and affording them an opportunity for material and intellectual progress. The latter task would be greater, even more difficult, than that of war and tranquillization. This might take years, as it has taken England in Egypt, or as it is taking us in the Philippines. Having entered upon the war from a sense of duty, and retaining control to make our work effective, we would be charged with being land grabbers. Indeed, after the burden of cost, many of our people would be anxious to annex part or all of the tranquillized territory as compensation and in the alleged interest of both peoples.

The fateful consequences of war no one can anticipate. He who multiplies its possible evil results is likely to prove a prophet. In war, the cause of good and efficient civic government suffers, corruption and waste follow in its wake, the discriminating sense of the people as to needed reforms is dulled and their scrutiny of their civil servants is abated. In the burst of patriotic enthusiasm, the sordid politician finds his greatest opportunity. War may give during its progress some feverish impulse to business, but in the end it interferes with prosperity and with that calm, peaceful progress of individual and community happiness that has now become so distinctly the ideal of present political movements. Let us pray then that our Government at Washington may avert this tremendous task. Let us hope that Carranza, if succeeding to control in Mexico, with our aid and influence, will bring about a condition of affairs, responsibility for which will not entail upon us burdensome consequences.

We should take much satisfaction in some phases of the situation, doubtful as others may be. The first is that the prospect of war does not awaken general popular enthusiasm. We must expect that adventurous youth will welcome war as an opportunity for heroic contest and test of courage. Then there are the newspapers which thrive upon excitement and some of which encourage a prospect of war because of the value of sensation. Then there are those Americans who

have lived and had business in Mexico. They number thousands. They have been making their living in Mexico, or investing their capital in a country where, for thirty years, law and order have been well preserved. One must sympathize deeply with them in the danger of life and suffering that they have had to undergo and in the destruction of their property. It is natural and proper that they should look to our Government for such protection as it can render. But where protection of their property and of the pursuit of their livelihood would involve such enormous cost to this Government as we have seen, we and they must use a sense of proportion. Of course we should not condemn them because they have been enterprising and have been making money in a way that had added to the commerce of our country and the prosperity of Mexico. But they must realize that the extent of our duty to them is necessarily somewhat affected by the burden which the Government would have to assume in its discharge. There is then no pressure and clamor for a military policy which the Administration cannot resist. The people are determined to do their duty, should that duty involve a war, and to go into it with faces stern and teeth set, and to clean up the job as promptly as it can be done; but they have at present little enthusiasm for it. May we not attribute this to their growing love of peace as well as to the absence of those soul-stirring issues which arouse warlike en-

thusiasm? Whatever its cause, this condition of the popular mind is a good thing. It restrains the politicians from pressing on with shouts of martial glory, and it upholds the hands of the Administration in seeking to avoid further conflict.

The other good thing is the offer of mediation by the three great nations of South America and our prompt acceptance. With the refusal of one of the warring Mexican parties to accept mediation, and with the probable defeat of the other, it may be that the actual result of the mediation may not be what is hoped for it. Still the situation is so full of possible quick changes that one cannot prophesy that the sincere effort of these mediators may not accomplish good. I have personal acquaintance with the gentlemen whom the Administration has chosen to represent us in this mediation, and I know their ability, their high character, their common sense and their diplomatic quality. Whatever may result, the offer of mediation and our acceptance are in themselves a great step toward future solution of international difficulties in this hemisphere. It is said that it ends the Monroe Doctrine. If we can unite with us the great powers of South America, so as to use our joint good offices to bring about peace whenever controversy arises between the nations of this hemisphere, and to prevent the oppressive or unjust intervention of European powers, the Monroe Doctrine is greatly strengthened for good. We shall



thus remove the ill-will that a misunderstanding of the real limitations of that Doctrine has aroused among South Americans.

And so let us separate to-day hoping and praying that out of the complicated situation that we have before us, a course may be found, honorable and in every way directed by high national purpose which shall not thrust upon the people of the United States a burden, we cannot measure and which will lead to Peace. Let us hold up the hands of the President in his effort to find it.



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